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SUBJECT Comments on Freedom of Press

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1. Since June 8 the situation of the Colombian Press has become more difficult. I have waited a while so I would be in a better position to inform you just what are the causes of the new crisis which doesn't seem any less grave than those we lived through in the past.
2. To refresh your memory a little, I give you some details that may be of use in judging what has happened and which will serve to clarify my idea.
3. During October of last year because of the meeting of the Congreso Nacional de Prensa (National Press Conference) his Excellency the President suspended the censorship that had been in effect in the country for about four years. The suspension of censorship was verbal. Thus the decree of 9 November 1949 establishing censorship of all publications written in the country went out of operation although without immediate application. That is to say I believe what I have already said on occasion - we had liberty but under the sword of Damocles. At whatever moment the government desired it could re-establish censorship without the necessity of passing any law
4. During the last months of the last year and the first of the present, with exceptions you already know --- censorship of some of the rural newspapers, censorship of the weekly "La Unidad", orders to directors of newspapers about news items and commentaries concerning chiefs of states friendly with Colombia, and every now and then, an arbitrary order from the Office of Information and Propaganda which are either rectified or not applied --- the Colombian press has enjoyed freedom.
5. During the bloody deeds which took place on the eighth and ninth of June and in which various students perished in the main streets of Bogotá, the government imposed censorship of the press for two days. Afterwards it was suspended. It was re-established again a few days later through a very forceful note sent to the newspapers "El Tiempo", "El Espectador" and the "Diario Gráfico" only. This lasted for two or three days. However, this freedom was only permitted to "El Espectador" and "El Tiempo" and not the "Diario Gráfico" which has been censored since the middle of last month.

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6. Yesterday upon the change of rector in the University the newspapers were verbally ordered to abstain from publishing adverse comments concerning the nomination or any information concerning the officials making this request. That is to say here is a concrete case of censorship of the press.
7. But the real gravity of the problem is that the press is subjected to the determinations of the government. At any moment, or in whatever circumstances, orders can be imparted to the various newspapers about certain happenings, prohibiting the publication of or commentary concerning the happening. There is liberty but also there is not. The press of the country has acted with exemplary responsibility taking into consideration the gravity of the present political situation and insofar as possibilities permit has vigilantly defended liberty. I cannot hide from you the fact that we are going through a difficult situation both politically and from a newspaper point of view. An analysis of the press situation by an independent commission would be very valuable.
8. It is superfluous to tell you that this information is strictly confidential and owing to the gravity of the situation in which we live, I ask you not to mention me as the forwarder of this information.
9. "I hope that a clarification of this situation may soon be achieved."

- end -

Press

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